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ABSTRACT

The benefits of learning a foreign language and arguments in support of language requirements in the college curriculum are discussed. The arguments concerning the acquisition of indirect benefits not inherent in the language skill itself through the learning of a foreign language prove inconvincing and only serve to divert one's attention from the main purpose of foreign language learning--to use the language. Foreign language education should provide the student with the opportunity to learn from fully competent instructors and participate in courses where the language of study is used as the medium of instruction or in part of the courses' assigned readings. This allows the setting of realistic language proficiency goals. For such a program to succeed, (1) faculty must be convinced that foreign language competence is useful and attainable, (2) language competencies of the faculty must be raised, (3) educators must concentrate on materials providing access to higher levels of language skill, (4) language teaching capacity must be expanded beyond the more commonly taught languages, and (5) increased attention must be given to original teaching, to patterns and speed of attrition in language skills, and to the reinforcement and restoration of language skills once acquired. (JK)

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Language Learning and Language Utilization

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More words have been written, more battles fought, more prophecies of gloom rendered over the sorry state of foreign language learning in the United States than over almost any other educational issue. Congressman Paul Simon's recent book which I commend to all of you is pehaps the most eloquent indictment of a monolingual America. I do not want to add yet another nostrum to the pile of solutions to the "language problem." Perhaps Daniel Moynihan was speaking in the wrong domain a few years ago when he recommended benign neglect; it might be more appropriate for our concern with language policy.

For the purpose of our discussion today, however, it is useful to categorize the arguments in the debate about the importance of learning or knowing a foreign language, particularly as it relates to language requirements in the school and college curriculum into two basic components, the first of which I intend to pass over very quickly. One set of arguments for the necessity or the desirability of requiring of students to have some language instruction concern a set of presumed indirect benefits, that is valuable consequences of learning a foreign language that do not inhere in the language skill itself. The classic arguments in this domain are:

1. any educated or cultured person should know another language; a variant on this is that all students should be exposed to the humanities and that foreign language and literature instruction is the heart of the humanities.

2. learning another language, helps students to know the

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cultural roots of our own civilization, or at least its high culture. This used to be a primary argument for learning Latin and Greek; it is now primarily used on behalf of French and German.

3. learning another language teaches one to understand ones own language better or the function of languages in general.

4. learning a language is difficult and therefore disciplines the mind; this also used to be a predominant argument for Latin and Greek.

5. learning a language is cosmopolitanizing, it produces transnational empathy, that is it enables an individual to put himself into the shoes of someone in another culture.

6. learning another language expands cognitive abilities and the ability to learn in general; this is the most recent and the most diffuse and the most extensive claim.

There are others, but this short list will suffice. As a former dean of instruction and academic planning in the faculty of arts and sciences at the University of Pennsylvania, someone who like many of you here has sat in inumerable committee meetings of faculty and students on the future of the language requirement, I can report what most of you already know. These arguments are not really convincing either to non-language department colleagues or to students. Where they can, students are--to use of one Ronald Reagan's favorite expressions--voting with their feet by not enrolling in voluntary language instruction. Nor is it clear that the substantive base for sustaining these arguments about indirect benefits of foreign language learning is strong. On most of them, there is almost no empirical evidence. What there is tends to be ambivalent at best and sometimes contrary to these points. For instance, a recent national

survey carried out by ETS for the Council on Learning on the international knowledge and attitudes of college students included a set of self-ratings and paper and pencil tests of language competencies of those students. This enabled them to test proposition 5 above, that foreign language learning cosmopolitanizes students. They found no correlation whatsoever between a knowledge of a foreign language on the one hand, and either knowledge of or positive affect toward other countries on the other. On proposition 6, the earlier survey evidence on the effect on of bingualism on the development of cognitive skills was that it hindered the capacity to learn; a few more recent studies indicate a positive effect--but the matter is as yet simply indeterminate.

On most of the othe propositions there is even less evidence that language learning is one of or the most effective way of reaching these goals, even if we decide the goals are genuine. On the first proposition, there are other humanities, many of them more intellectually enriching than language learning; on the second, the utility of French or German as high roads into our cultural heritage has long since vanished; on the fourth, calculus, organic chemistry and physics supply as much scourging of the soul as students need; and on the third, I know of no solid evidence other than many people's gut feelings that studying, say, two years of Parisian French does anything for one's skills in English.

I do not want to disarm these arguments entirely, only to suggest that they are decreasingly persuasive and that they have diverted our attention from another class of purposes for foreign language learning. That is that people should learn foreign languages so that they can use those skills. From this proposition,

it might reasonably follow that only those who have a reasonable expectation of using foreign language skills should be required to acquire them while they are in school. As to who such people are, I will settle for a definition of probable need somewhere midway between the estimations of the language profession and, say, the economics or physics departments. I do so with one caveat, however, while I am in favor of as broad a definition of future need as possible, if we try to reinstate such a general requirement as the French and German exams we used to inflict on all Ph.D. candidates, we will hopelessly corrupt the process, just as we did before. Moreover, our argument is no longer persuasive that everyone should acquire a skill as part of a national and personal stockpiling because who knows who will be required to use it. For one thing we have absolutely no idea of what percent of the adult population, or even the college educated or professional population, has any use whatsoever for foreign language skills. And if they do, whether they cannot acquire it when the felt need arises as adults rather than trying to dredge up school-boy lessons. Mreover, as Kurt Muller and I are discovering in a national study we are now engaged in, no one knows how much or what segments of language skills people retain after a prolonged period of disuse of that language. Perhaps in a future meeting we could describe the nature of the research that is proceeding on that topic.

Let me leave aside the question of who should need language competencies--although I would personally urge that students majoring in the soft social sciences, that is, anthropology, history, political science, and even my own ultra-parochial discipline sociology--omitting economics and psychology--and perhaps adding those training for international business. I will also leave aside a discussion of the dismal state of resources for providing adults with language training when it is needed; and confine my comments to those we decide should have some language skill and who should acquire it in school or college. The first point that needs to be made that so long as the responsibility for students' mastery of a foreign language is seen as the sole or even the primary responsibility of the language departments motivating students to master a language will be impossible to accomplish. The disciplinary departments and those princes of the church, the department chairpersons, must not only want their majors to have a genuine language competency, but some faculty members in those departments must themselves be able to read and/or speak well at least one foreign language and regularly follow the literature on their discipline in that language. The student is much more likely do as the faculty does, not just what it says the student should do.

Second, it is essential that the student have an opportunity--or perhaps be required--to participate in a course in which the language he has studied is used either as a medium of instruction or as part of the assigned readings in the course. Evidence of satisfactory completion of such a course--taught by one or more people who themselves have high language competency and are tough-minded enough not to bend the requirements too far--would, in my view, be a good

substitute for the courses completed or general proficiency examinations now used. It would communicate to the students that a foreign language skill is to be used, and that use is for something other than reading literature. It places the responsibility for students' education in this domain on the educational philosophy of the school as a whole if the goal is to introduce it into general education -or at least the affected departments if it is to be confined to majors, rather than "ghettoizing" that responsibility as being the concern of the language and literature departments as we do now. Moreover, if the basic language instruction is aiming at actual use rather than just passing language tests, real learning goals could be set and feedback from the disciplinary departments would quickly establish whether or not the basic language skill instruction was adequate. Personally, I would allow a student to acquire that language competence wherever or however he saw fit rather than setting a certain number of years' worth of language courses as a requirement. But I would make very sure that the student knew that he had to demonstrate a high level of skill in its use. I might add that this notion of removing the reponsibility for language skill use from the language to the disciplinary departments is different from what is taking place in some of the more imaginative language departments today, that is the introduction of substantive courses--mainly cultural in focus--on the country where the language is being studied. These are to be encouraged, but do not really accomplish the purpose we are here addressing.

The notion of an entire institutional commitment to language learning, reflected in the introduction of substantive courses in selected departments in which students are encouraged or required to

use their skills, and the use of performance in these courses as a proxy for proficiency exams seems so obvious and simple that one would expect prototypes of such courses to exist in most institutions. In the main, they do not. In preparing for this talk I took the trouble to examine the course catalogs and do a little inquisitive telephoning with eight universities representing some geographic spread and different levels of "selectivity." I was looking for any courses--in the social sciences departments that even mentioned a foreign language competency as either required or desirable. The sheets I am handing out give diagramatically the results of that search and the list of courses we did uncover. I do not believe that any other set of institutions would have improved the picture.

You will see that there were only 36 courses out of the thousands offered in these universities which mentioned a foreign language competency in the catalog descriptions of courses in the indicated social science disciplines. All but 11 of these courses are at the University of Wisconsin, mainly in the history department. Here, for whatever it is worth, one might note that Wisconsin was one of the first large, humanities based universities to drop the language requirement for all undergraduates. Among the 36 courses, only five of them were at the undergraduate level, and they were located at the Universities of Wisconsin and Virginia. Looking at the titles of the courses, they fall mainly in history and are advanced graduate seminars. I have no idea of their enrolments but would expect them to be very low. The only programmatic requirement I encountered was the the University of Wisconsin in their International Relations Department. Again as an aside, several years

ago I did two exercises. One would expect internatinal relations departments or majors to be prime places for the appearance of foreign language uses. I took some ten year's of dissertations from a leading universities' international relations department and examined the footnotes for any references to materials other than in English. The only ones I discovered were in the dissertations of foreign students. My guess is that this phenomenon is very general, and would extend to all of the social science disciplines. The otherexercise was to examine the course syllabi and assigned reading lists in all of the history, political science and international relations courses in a large number of colleges and universities in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Foreign language references were virtually unrepresented.

These data indicate that there is a fair distance to go if the strategy I am suggesting is to succeed. We are almost at ground zero, and this fact ought to be said again and again to the university and college administrations and to the faculty of the relevant departments. The present situation is, frankly, a disgrace.

What then is to be done? What are the obstacles and what specific actions need to be taken?

1. The first job is to convince the faculty that a foreign language competence is both useful and attainable. While such a judgment is general the point must be made more specifically, that is about particular languages and the materials in that discipline available in those languages that are not available or are less satisfactorily available in English. A prolonged campaign to influence the content of basic disciplinary text books so that they include materials drawn from the literatures of other countries would be an immensely valuable investment. Beyond that, bibliographies prepared in each of the disciplines covering the basic sub-fields around which courses are organized would also be extremely helpful. And to get a language department professor and a disciplinary department professor to jointly teach a course would be an even greater coup. The point is that it is the existing core of the disciplines that must be influenced, not just the creation of a set of specialized courses on the periphery which the few we found represent. They are especially likely to have a limited long term impact when they are administratively located not in the disciplines themselves, but in the language departments.

2. For the same reasons, it is essential that the language competencies of the faculty be raised. Nothing will stiffen someone's resolve that foreign languages are not important on grounds of principle than to be monolingual himself. We tend to see the students as the targets of the broadening effects of foreign visitors and visits; an institutional policy to encourage foreign travel tied to language skills for faculty would have a much greater long term

pay off. In the short run, an effort to identify allies who have usable language skills to start with and finding ways to build upon their existing skill base is a good starting point.

3. We must break out of this cycle of putting almost all of our energy into teaching a large number of students a very small amount of one foreign language. Our language teaching practice is a mile wide and an inch thin, that is everyone is enrolled in courses for the first year or two of a language. One consequence is that almost no one ever gets to a level of skill where he or she can truly use a language. Surely if we emphasized language use rather than minimum number of courses passed, we could begin to get at least some of our students to a sufficient level of competency where they could really begin to use it.

We need to develop materials and teaching strategies focussed on the higher level of language skills. Most of the available texts are focussed on very low levels of skill; after the first two years literature tends to take over. How do we get people from a basic skill up to a level of competence, particularly in speaking and comprehension, where the language is genuinely usable? Clearly, not everyone need be taken to the highest level of skill, but the materials and teaching technologies ought to be there for those who should or want to develop such skills.

4. As our commercial and political world expands in the coming decades, the traditional obsession of our language teaching with Iberian Spanish, Parisian French, and German becomes less and less defensible. We must expand our language teaching capacity even at the primary and secondary school level to include Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Latin American Spanish, Prtugese and even some of the

scarcer languages. Surely many of the nations with whom the American citizen will have to deal in the next century are not going to be in Western Europe.

There is another reason for expanding our compass to include the less commonly taught languages. Our count in the sample of universities of courses which had language prerequisites is probably an underestimation in one important aspect. On some of these campuses, courses using foreign language materials are offered not by disciplinary departments but by organized language and area programs, particularly when they deal with the non-western world. These programs have had to tailor language instruction to use since their students know full well that they cannot satisfactorily study the countries in which they are interested without a language competence. Surely the area studies programs provide both models and allies in the kind of campus campaign I have been recommending. At present, when fulfilling the language requirement almost inevitably means for a student a continuation of high school french or spanish, language and area studies programs have little or no interest in the role of language learning in the institution's educational philosophy as a whole, and that is a pity.

5. While we can argue as I have just done for an intra-institutional usage pattern for foreign languages, in the long run it will not succeed if our concern for language skills stops at the point students leave school. If we argue that the skill is useful in later life it behooves us to see whether we can enhance the chances that it will be. This means that we must give some attention both in our original teaching and later to the patterns and speed of attrition in language skills, and how to reinforce and restore skills once

acquired. It seems to me to be irresponsible to argue that students need to achieve a high level of competence in a foreign language if we are fairly sure that five of ten years later little or any of it will remain. And while I have been arguing here for an on campus philosophy of use-oriented language learning, the point at which it is truly most likely to occur is in adults long after they are out of school. It further seems to me to be irresponsible if language teachers have no contribution to make for the needs of adults while we spend all of our time on high school students and on freshmen and sophomores in college.

SAMPLE OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES INDICATING LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE CLASSES

	UCLA	CARLETON	U.of MIAMI	SWARTHMORE	TEXAS/AUSTIN	VIRGINIA	WISCONSIN	YALE	STANFORD	PENNSYLVANIA
ANTHROPOLOGY	X X		X	-	G	X	X X		X X	X X
ECONOMICS	X X		X	X	X	X	X X		X X	X X
HISTORY	R A		X	X	GP EL	SP G	F,L,G,Gr. I,S,R,EE— F		J	X X
POLITICAL SCIENCE	X X		X	X	SP	X	R		J	X X
SOCIOLOGY	X X		X	X	X	X	X X		X X	X X

WISCONSIN- History: Latin, French, Greek, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Scandinavian, Finish, East European, Southeast Asian, Southeast European, Chinese, Japanese, South Asia, Persian

UG. UCLA Social Tho't & Movements 18th-20th c: background in Russian History, Russian Literature or European Social History
G UCLA Methods in Armenian Oral History: proficiency in Armenian
G Texas Seminar: Latin American Politics: some reading knowledge of Spanish & Portuguese desirable
G Texas Seminar in Latin American History: reading knowledge of Spanish/Portuguese required.
G Texas Research Seminar in Latin American History: reading knowledge of Spanish/Portuguese required
G Texas Research Seminar in Modern European History: reading knowledge of modern European language
UG Va. Early modern Spain & Portugal: 12 hours of European history or advanceed Spanish/Portuguese literature
UG Va. Germany & Austria 1740-1918 - 6 hours history, German literature, economics or government
UG Wisc. Arab provinces under Ottoman Empire: reading knowledge of French desirable
UG Wisc. IR program for French Area Studies requires passing proficiency test
G Wisc. Latin Paleography: reading knowledge of Latin
G Wisc. Seminar in Medieval History: reading knowledge of Latin, French, German;
G Wisc. Seminar in Byzantine History & Civilization: reading knowledge Greek, Latin; competence in French & German assumed.
G Wisc. Seminar in Medieval History: reading knowledge Latin, French, Italian or German
G Wisc. Seminar in History of Europe during the Reformation; work with source materials in one language.
G Wisc. Seminar in Economics & Social History of Early Modern Europe—reading knowledge French, Italian, Spanish.
G. Wisc. Seminar in Central European History: reading knowledge of German
G Wisc. Seminar in Scandinavian History: reading knowledge of Finnish or a Scandinavian language
G Wisc. Seminar in History of Russian Emperor, Modern History of Southeast Europe: reading knowledge of Russian or Southeast European language
G. Wisc. Seminar in History of the Soviet Union & Modern History of East Central Europe: reading knowledge of Russian, German or East European Language
G Wisc. Seminar in Modern French History: reading knowledge of French
G Wisc. Seminar in Southeast Asian History: seminar for graduate students with background in appropriate Southeast Asian Languages
G Wisc. Proseminars in Modern East Asian History: enrollment in Chinese or Japanese language courses

G. Wisc. Seminar in Traditional & Modern Chinese Intellectual History: Reading knowledge of classical chinese desirable.
G Wisc. Seminar in Modern Chinese History: appropriate Chenese language background
G Wisc. Seminar in Modern Japanese History: reading knowledge of elementary Japanese.
G Wisc. Seminar on May 4th Movement: reading knowledge of Chinese
G Wisc. Seminar in South Asian History: reading knowledge of relevant South Asian Languages
G Wisc. Seminar in Muslim Indian History: reading knowledge of Persian & other relevant South Asian & European languages
G Wisc. Proseminar in Latin American History: reading knowledge of Spanish or Portuguese
G Wisc. Research Seminar in Colonial Spanish America: reading knowledge of Spanish or Portuguese
G Wisc. Seminar in Brazilian History: reading knowledge of Portuguese
G Wisc. Seminar in Latin American History national period: reading knowledge of Spanish
G Wisc. Soviet Politics: reading knowledge of Russian
G Stan. Graduate Seminar: Japapese historical texts
G Stan. Advanced Seminar: Japanese Politics: reading knowledge of Japanese required